

Message Text

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16

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CPR-01 SSO-00 NSCE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 OMB-01 SAJ-01 SAM-01

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P R 070340Z JUL 76

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1100

INFO USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

FBIS OKINAWA

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L 7898

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PINR CH

SUBJECT: DEATH OF CHU TEH

SUMMARY: CHU TEH, WHO PASSED AWAY JULY 6, IS THE
FOURTH MEMBER OF THE POLITIBURO'S STANDING COMMITTEE TO DIE
IN 15 MONTHS. HIS DEATH REDUCES MEMBERSHIP IN THE STANDING
COMMITTEE TO FIVE, AND WILL INCREASE ON PEKING TO
MAKE SOME ADJUSTMENTS IN ITS INCREASING WEAKENED LEADER-
SHIP. POLITIBURO MEMBER WU TEH IS LIKELY TO TAKE CHU TEH'S
PLACE IN GREETING FOREIGN GUESTS, A FUNCTION HE PERFORMED
IN HIS CAPACITY AS CHAIRMAN OF THE NPC STANDING COMMITTEE.
END SUMMARY

1. CHU TEH'S DEATH YESTERDAY AT THE AGE OF 90 WAS SUPRISINGLY
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ONLY BECAUSE ALL EYES HAVE BEEN FOCUSED ON THE STATE OF HEALTH

OF CHAIRMAN MAO. AS THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO CHU HAS SUFFERED BOUTS OF ILLNESS ON SEVERAL PREVIOUS OCCASIONS, ALTHOUGH HE WAS APPARENTLY ROBUST ON HIS LAST PUBLIC APPEARANCE DURING AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER FRASER'S VISIT LAST MONTH.

2. CHU WHO COMMANDED THE MILITARY FORCES IN MAO'S REVOLUTIONARY BASE IN CHINGKANGSHAN, WENT ON TO BECOME THE COMMANDER OF THE ENTIRE COMMUNIST ARMY IN THE 1930'S AND 40'S. HE IS KNOWN TO HAVE OPPOSED MAO ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, INCLUDING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, BUT ALWAYS REMAINED AMONG CHINA'S TOP LEADERSHIP. IN RECENT YEARS HE APPEARED TO HAVE WITHDRAWN TO A LARGELY CEREMONIAL ROLE BUT HIS PRESTIGE AMONG CHINESE REMAINED HIGH, PARTICULARLY IN PLA CIRCLES.

3. CHU'S DEATH LEAVES TWO VACANCIES: THAT OF CHAIRMAN OF THE NPC STANDING COMMITTEE, AND HIS PARTY POSITION AS POLITBURO STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBER. THE NPC STANDING COMMITTEE JOB IS SIGNIFICANT CHIEFLY IN ITS PROTOCOL FUNCTION AS THE PRC'S NEAREST EQUIVALENT TO A CHIEF OF STATE. PARTICULARLY IN RECENT WEEKS, CHU TEH HAS SUBSTITUTED FOR CHAIRMAN MAO IN GREETING IMPORTANT FOREIGN LEADERS. WHILE CHU'S RANKING DEPUTY IS MME. SOONG CHING-LING, SUN- YAT-SEN'S WIDOW, HIS REPLACEMENT IN PRACTICE IS LIKELY TO BE POLITBURO MEMBER WU TEH. WHO AS NPC STANDING COMMITTEE VICE CHAIRMAN SUBSTITUTED FOR CHU LAST WEEKEND IN RECEIVING THE GUINEAN AMBASSADOR'S CREDENTIALS.

4. CHU'S VACANCY IN THE POLITBURO, FOLLOWING THE DEATHS OF TUNG PI-WU, KANG SHENG AND CHOU EN-LAI, LEAVES ONLY FIVE STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS: CHAIRMAN MAO, PREMIER HUA KUO-FENG, WANG HUNG-WEN, YEH CHIEN-YING, AND CHANG CHUN-CHIAO. OF THESE, ONLY YEH CHIEN-YING (OTHER THAN MAO HIMSELF) IS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PRE-CULTURAL REVOLUTION, OLD GUARD. BOTH YEH AND CHU WERE REPORTED TO HAVE DEFENDED TENG HSIAO-PING, AGAINST LEFTIST ATTACKS EARLIER THIS YEAR. THUS, WITH CHU GONE, THE BALANCE IN THE STANDING COMMITTEE APPEARS TO HAVE TILTED AGAINST THE SUPPORTERS OF A CHOU-TENG LINE IN DOMESTIC POLICY.

5. IN THE POLITBURO AS A WHOLE, HOWEVER, MODERATE STRENGTH APPEARS TO BE SUBSTANTIALLY GREATER. THIS IMBALANCE BETWEEN

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THE POLITBURO AND ITS STANDING COMMITTEE, AGGRAVATED BY THE NOW OBVIOUS NEED TO FILL VACANCIES IN THE LATTER, IS LIKELY TO EXACERBATE THE TENSIONS ALREADY EXISTING IN THE TOP LEADERSHIP OF THE PRC. IN THIS RESPECT, THE ROLE OF THE PLA WILL BE IMPORTANT. MILITARY COMMANDERS, HAVING LOST THEIR TWO MOST PRESTIGIOUS LEADERS, CHOU EN-LAI AND CHU TEH, IN THE SPACE OF 7 MONTHS, WILL PRESUMABLY BE ANXIOUS TO PREVENT THE EMERGENCY OF POLITBURO DOMINATED BY CIVILIAN LEADERS WHO

HAVE RISEN TO POWER ONLY SINCE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION.

6. ANY SHIFT ENGENDERED BY CHU TEH'S DEATH WILL TAKE PLACE AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF MAO'S CONTINUED DECLINE. INDEED, THE LOSE OF SO MANY OLD COMRADES IN SUCH A SHORT TIME MAY BE A CONTRIBUTORY FACTOR TO MAO'S POOR STATE OF HEALTH. THE CHAIRMAN'S HEALTH HAS DECLINED VISIBLY SINCE CHOU EN-LAI'S DEATH IN JANUARY, AND THE LOSS OF HIS EARLIEST COMRADE-IN-ARMS MAY BE ONE MORE BLOW TO AN OLD MAN WHO IS INCREASINGLY UNABLE TO CONTROL THE COURSE OF EVENTS.
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